

## The History of Florence [Translated]



IT was my intention when I first resolved upon writing the things done by the Florentine people, within and without their city, to begin my narrative with the year 1434 of the Christian era, at which time the family of the Medici, by the merits of Cosimo and his father Giovanni, exercised more authority in Florence than any one else. For I thought to myself that Messer Lionardo d Arezzo and Messer Poggio, two excellent historians, had related all the events that had occurred previous to that time. But having afterwards diligently read their writings to see in what order and manner they had proceeded, so that by imitating them our history might be the more approved by the reader, I found that in their descriptions of the wars carried on by the Florentines with foreign princes and peoples they had been most diligent; but of their civil discords and internal dissensions, and of the effects resulting therefrom, they had in part been silent, and in part had described them very briefly, which to the reader could be neither useful nor agreeable. I believe they did so because these facts seemed to them so unimportant that they judged them unworthy of being recorded in history, or because they feared to offend the descendants of those who took part in them, and who by the narration of these facts might have deemed themselves calumniated. These two reasons (be it said with their leave) seemed to me wholly unworthy of such great men; because if anything delights or instructs in history, it is that which is described in detail; and if any lesson is useful to the citizens who govern republics, it is that which demonstrates the causes of the hatreds and dissensions in the republic, so that, having learned wisdom from the perils experienced by others, they may maintain themselves united. And if the divisions of any republic were ever noteworthy, those of Florence certainly are most so, because the greater part of the other republics of

which we have any knowledge were content with one division, by which, according to chance, they either increased or ruined their city. But Florence, not content with one division, had many. In Rome, as everybody knows, after the expulsion of the kings, a division arose between the nobles and the people, and with that she maintained herself until her downfall. So did Athens, and so all the republics that flourished in those times. But in Florence, the first division was amongst the nobles, afterwards between the nobles and the citizens, and finally between the citizens and the populace; and many times it happened that one of the parties that remained in power again divided in two. These divisions caused so many deaths, so many exiles, so much destruction of so many families, as never occurred in any other city of which we have any record. And truly no other circumstance so much illustrates the power of our city as that which resulted from these divisions, which would have been enough to destroy any other great and powerful republic.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR Niccolo di Bernardo dei Machiavelli was an Italian historian, philosopher, humanist, and writer based in Florence during the Renaissance. He is one of the main founders of modern political science. He was a diplomat, political philosopher, playwright, and a civil servant of the Florentine Republic. He also wrote comedies, carnival songs, poetry, and some of the most well-known personal correspondence in the Italian language. His position in the regime of Florence as Secretary to the Second Chancery of the Republic of Florence lasted from 1498 to 1512, a period in which the Medici were not in power. Machiavelli's most well-known writing was, however, after this period, during the time when the Medici recovered power, and Machiavelli was removed from all positions of responsibility.

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